

# What Is Cholesterol-Lowering Medicine?

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If your doctor has decided that you need to take medicine to reduce high cholesterol, it's because you're at high risk for heart disease or stroke. Usually, the treatment combines diet and medicine.

Most heart disease and many strokes are caused by a buildup of fat, cholesterol and other substances called plaque in the inner walls of your arteries. The arteries can become clogged and narrow, and blood flow is reduced. If a blood clot forms and blocks the blood flow to your heart, it causes a heart attack. If a blood clot blocks an artery leading to or in the brain, a stroke results.

Heart and blood vessel diseases kill someone every 33 seconds! By following your doctor's advice, you can help prevent them.



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## What should I know about the medicine?

Your doctor will decide on the medicine that's best for you. Each of these drugs does something a little different. Often you'll be asked to take more than one. All cholesterol-lowering medicines are used with dietary therapy. Always follow your doctor's orders carefully, and let him or her know if you have any side effects. Never stop taking your medicine on your own!

**Bile acid binders** help rid the body of cholesterol. Some names are "cholestyramine" and "cholestipol."

- These often come in a powder that you mix with water or juice.
- Side effects may include constipation, bloating, nausea and gas. To reduce these effects, eat more fiber and drink more fluids.

**"Niacin"** is a B vitamin. It's also called nicotinic acid. Take this only if your doctor has prescribed it.

- It can lower total cholesterol, LDL (bad) cholesterol and triglyceride (blood fat) levels. It can also raise HDL (good) cholesterol levels.
- It may cause flushing and itching. It could also upset your stomach and cause other side effects your doctor can describe.

**HMG-CoA reductase inhibitors** stimulate the body to process and break down cholesterol.

- Some names are "lovastatin," "pravastatin" and "simvastatin."
- Possible side effects include constipation, stomach pain or cramps and gas.

- A few patients experience muscle pain, weakness or brown urine.
- “Gemfibrozil” is a fibric acid.
- It’s especially good for lowering triglyceride (blood fat) levels.

- A few patients have stomach problems when they take it.
- “Probucol” is taken at breakfast and dinner.
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## How do I remember to take my medicine?

Sometimes it’s hard to keep track of your medicine. But to be safe, you must take it properly. Here are some good ways:

- Take your medicine at the same time each day along with meals or other daily events, like brushing your teeth.
- Use a weekly pill box with separate compartments for each day or time of day.
- Computerized pill boxes can alert you when it’s time to take a pill or order refills.
- Ask family and friends to help remind you.
- Use a pill calendar or drug reminder chart.
- Leave notes to remind yourself.
- Try an e-mail reminder or beeper service.
- Wear a wristwatch with an alarm.

## How do I know if it’s working?

Your doctor will test your blood cholesterol level when needed. You should keep track of your cholesterol level, perhaps using a chart or writing it on your calendar. Together with your doctor, set a goal and ask how

long it may take to reach that goal. Be sure to follow up with your doctor after reaching your goal. Don’t stop medication unless your doctor tells you to.

## How can I learn more?

- Talk to your doctor, nurse or health care professional. Or call your American Heart Association at 1-800-242-8721, or the American Stroke Association at 1-888-478-7653.
- If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It’s very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.

## Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

- Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your doctor. For example:

What if I forget a dose?

Should I avoid any foods or other medicines?

How long will it take me to reach my cholesterol goals?




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